

r! Tanning & Currying.

The Origin and History of Tanning and Currying in Peabody.

There is quite a difference of opinion among individuals in regard to the *origin* of things. Thus, for instance, it is assumed by some, that when God made the promise to Noah, that He would set His bow in the clouds after a shower as a token of the covenant between Him and earth, that the waters should no more become a flood, this was the rainbow's first appearance. Others contest this notion, and say that, according to the laws of Nature, it must always have been so, and that the rainbow must always have made its appearance after a shower previous to the flood, as well as after it. Then another subject upon which there has been an honest difference of opinion is, whether the vice of Intemperance existed among the antediluvians previous to the sad mistake made by Noah after he came out of the ark. Some think that because, it is said, that the "wickedness of man was great, etc.," at that time, therefore we may infer that Intemperance was *one* of the vices. Others contend that, although the antediluvians were bad enough to do this, if the chance had been theirs yet, as wine was not discovered till after the flood, they could not have been drunkards. But leaving these points to be settled by linguists, we pass to another subject, named at the head of this article, upon which there will, we trust, be but one opinion.

If we look back to the *origin* of Tanning and Currying in this town of Peabody, (once called Danvers) and compare it with what is done in that line of business at the present day, it will give us some idea of Yankee enterprise. It will show us how "great a matter a little fire kindleth" in the hands of free-born citizens of the old Bay State. So far as we can ascertain, the man who began to manufacture leather in this town was Mr. Joseph Southwick, (grandfather of the late Mr. Philip Southwick, a merchant in Boston, who died a few years ago) a Quaker preacher, and a very exemplary citizen, who, like the apostle Paul, could say to his hearers: "Neither do we eat any man's bread for naught; for, laboring night and day because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God."

Preachers of the Word at the present day cannot, of course, live and act just exactly in that way. The discourses now called for, and expected by every religious denomination, cannot be thought out and written by clergymen, while they are fleshing hides, grinding bark, pulling wool, cleaning fish, making boots and shoes, or pursuing any branch of business that requires close attention to meet with any success. No, if he would interest his hearers he must not have a heavy weight of pecuniary interest pressing down upon his mental power, and thus blunting his perceptive faculties, and clipping the wings of a well-trained but gorgeous imagination. With a mind free his thoughts can soar to the zenith of the moral heavens over us, or strike down into the depths of that ocean of sublime truths that flood the pages of Holy Writ. This is what his hearers will expect from him, and be disappointed if some gems of religious truth are not presented every Sabbath. Besides, there are those, even at the present day, who deny the doctrine that "God made of one blood all nations of men that dwell on the face of the earth;" they hold the same theory, once advocated by Buffon, Helvetius and Monbodo, viz., that the human race sprung from a number of different sources. Such authors ought to be completely unhorsed, and thrown back into the dark ages, to flounder on through the chaos of conflicting opinions. And to do this clergymen must consult books, and dig up from mines of human thought diamonds of inestimable value.

Mr. Southwick began to tan sheepskins in a *canoe* not far from the extensive tannery now owned by Mr. E. W. Upton. In what year Mr. S. began his work we have not been able to ascertain exactly; but it was probably between

1750 and 1770. Bark was then ground with a huge circular stone that was rolled round by a horse. (The same has since been used to mill hides.) Mrs. Southwick attended the mill with a rake, and ground bark for her husband, proving herself a good "helpmeet," and setting a good example of industry that it would be well for some of the lily-fingered and hair-curved misses of the present day to imitate. Not that we desire them to tend bark-mills, mill-hides, or pull woolskins for a living; neither ought they to stalk abroad on the main street all day and evening, with the hat standing at considerable distance from the brow, and ribbons, of various colors and hues, streaming in the wind; the dress so long behind that unless it is held up by one hand, it must drag through dust, mud or slush, and bear not a very faint resemblance to the "Pilgrim's muckrake. Much less valuable must they be who indulge in these fashionable notions than was the industrious Quakeress that ground hemlock bark beneath the ponderous millstone for her husband.

Mr. S., after a short time, took a partner into business with himself — Mr. Josiah Southwick; and their purchases being extended, the tannery was enlarged by the addition of two hogheads.

This was the first firm that commenced currying in Danvers. There was afterwards another tannery, consisting of one vat, that was put down back of the brick house on Central street, now owned by Mr. Nathan H. Poor, town clerk of Peabody. It was occupied by the firm of John and Joshua Buxton. A pair of ox-horns, nailed to the gable end of a building, was the sign that informed the passer-by of the kind of business carried on there; quite as significant an emblem of progress, as were the iron horns worn by Zedekiah, of the victories that he predicted Ahab would gain over the Syrians; or as high-topped bonnets, almost "pin-naled in clouds," are of sound heads beneath them. This tannery was, in the course of a few years, increased to four vats; and a new sign was then put up, bearing the following inscription: "J. & J. Buxton, tanners." In order to distinguish between the firm, one was called J. Buxton, the other J. i. Buxton. In the year 1771, the yard was purchased by Mr. Joseph Poor, whose son lived for quite a number of years near the spot; and whose grandson, bearing the same Christian name, is now living at not a very great distance off.

At that time bark could be bought at \$2.25 per cord, and was brought from Salem with ox teams. Four or five cords were the most ever purchased at once. Hides were then sold for 4 cents per lb. Sole leather brought 20 cents per lb. From this period tan-yards began to multiply, and there has been a steady increase of the business ever since, till it has reached its present enlarged state. Could one "Simon, a tanner, who lived on the seaside in the days of the apostles, be allowed to visit this world once more, and for a few days stop here in Peabody, he would be astonished at the great increase that has taken place, and the decided improvements in that business, of which (so far as history informs us) he was the *originator*. The size, depths and number of water-pits, lime-pits and tan-vats, that are now used, would be far beyond his comprehension. The buildings erected, the horse-mills, the water-mills, and the steam mills now used, the number of cords of bark now ground, the number of hides tanned and curried, and sold in Boston every year—should these all be made to appear before his inexperienced eye, he would start back, and his lips give birth to one expression, not wholly unlike that which dropped from the mouth of the Queen of Sheba, after she had beheld the wisdom of Solomon—"the house he had built, the meat of his table, his servants, his cup bearers, their apparel, etc." "It was a true report," said she, "which I heard of thine acts, and of thy wisdom. Howbeit, I believed not till I come, and mine eyes have seen it."

There is a tradition connected with one of the tan-yards in Danvers that we will just mention. It is that this yard was at first located near Salem Common during the struggle between this country and Great Britain. The owner of it was in possession of a considerable sum of hard money, and he wanted to conceal it from the Government that was exacting heavy taxes. So he sunk it to the bottom of one of his tan-vats. Then, leaving home

and business, he remained absent during the war. After that blast was fully blown, and peace followed, he returned, and in-searching, found his hidden treasure safe in its silent repose. Of course, a literal resurrection soon took place, and the man walked off with his treasure in his possession.

There would be no great difficulty in drawing up a good moral from this. The laying up of treasures in heaven is of vastly more consequence than the mere accumulation and preservation of *earthly* riches can be. Had the man above mentioned been seen in his efforts to conceal his money, the treasure might have been missing when he returned. Or had some one, in sport, with a pole sounded the depth of the vat, or with a hook endeavored to ascertain whether any stock by mistake had been left therein, the bag that held this treasure would have been discovered, drawn up, and made use of. But the treasure that may be laid up in heaven, "neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor can thieves break through and steal it." Like jewels in the crown of the Redeemer, they will shine when the heavens have rolled together like a scroll, and the solid earth has passed away.

The tan-yard above alluded to was afterward purchased, the vats taken up and removed to Danvers; they finally came into the hands of the late Henry Poor, Esq. There has been quite a change in the business of tanning and currying in this town during the last thirty years. According to an account taken in 1850, there were:

No. of tanners and men employed,	138
" vats occupied,	3,810
" hides worked in each year,	147,788
" curriers and men employed,	137
" cords of bark used,	9,200
" hides curried,	107,000
" shoe manufacturers,	6
" morocco factories,	5

Since then (1850) the increase in all these branches of business (save one, shoe manufacturers) has been considerable. The following statement of business affairs in Peabody at the present time is not far from being exactly correct:

No. of leather manufacturers,	49
" vats occupied,	5,060
" hides worked and curried,	711,442
" curriers and men employed,	820
" cords of bark used,	40,774
" morocco & sheepskin factories,	22
" shoe manufactories,	1

Perhaps some, out of town, after reading the above, may wonder why "stately palaces" are not erected here by those who are the reapers in this field of industry. Two reasons may be given. One is, the sensible men of this town do not think so much, as some do out of town, of making a great outward show; but that a good moral character is of more value than money. Another reason is, even if they were thus disposed, the present condition of the business world is such that no large expenditures can be borne.

Tanning and currying, at the present time, is not what it was a few years ago. Many have been the failures in that line of business, but the hope still is, that the final result will be beneficial. To such troublous times often belong the development of some of the best and noblest qualities. It was the stormy gulf of Ormus that threw up the finest pearls. But the efforts of too many in business have resembled the attempts of him who started to soar beyond the "diurnal orb;" and as he approached the sun, found his pinions melting, and his fall was conspicuous in exact proportion to the elevation to which he aspired. Great events sometimes depend on small changes. If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the condition of the world might have been different, says Pascal. Many of the business men have kept on too long; and seemed like the fabled St. Denys, who, when his head was cut off, the operation was so silently done, walked a considerable distance before the important member fell from his shoulders and rolled down to his feet. Some of the failures have been brought on by the fall in the price of goods; and merchants and manufacturers have gone down like the Roman virgin that expired under the weight of what she mistook for ornaments. Yet there are those that continue to move on like the gods of Homer in the cars of ancient divinity, among moving mountains and the surges of an earthquake.

If a ram's horn nailed up for a sign

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represented the state of things in that line of business, at that time, as being firm and steadfast, Abraham's ram, held fast in a thicket by his horns, would be quite as good and appropriate a symbol of its present condition.